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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000019

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/14/2018  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PROP](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#)  
PTER, IR, IZ  
SUBJECT: ISCI-LED PROTEST AGAINST VIOLENCE IN BASRAH

REF: MX-GBR-J2X-FHT-20938

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CLASSIFIED BY: Howell H. Howard, Director, U.S. Regional Embassy  
Office, Basrah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

11. (C/Rel MCFI) SUMMARY: Basrawis affiliated with the Basrah Islamic List (BIL) parties on the provincial council (ISCI, Badr, Thar Allah, Sayyid al-Shuhada, Shaheed al-Mihrab, Hizbollah Movement) took to the streets March 8, protesting the city's deteriorating security. An estimated 600-800 participants marched a little over an hour through Basrah ending at the police headquarters where speeches were delivered criticizing the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) for failing to perform their duties. ISCI, however, may have had ulterior motives for the demonstrations aiming to pressure the ISF into confronting ISCI's Sadrist rivals, replacing the ISF leadership with ISCI affiliates, and preparing for ISCI's future election prospects. End summary.

ISCI/BADR LEAD THE MARCH

12. (C/REL MCFI) On March 8, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and its militant wing, Badr Organization, led a march in downtown Basrah to protest the city's deteriorating security. The hour-long march began in Azedden Salim Square and ended at the police headquarters, where organizers delivered speeches demanding security improvements. The ISF were apprised of the march in advance and as a precaution closed off some vehicular routes and increased the ISF presence in the city. The protest was widely characterized as peaceful, though one British report indicated the possible death of an outspoken Badr member (Reftel). Comment: We doubt a death occurred as the event was widely covered in the media and a death likely would have been reported. End Comment.

13. (C/REL MCFI) Badr leader and Provincial Council member Hasan al-Rashid told the REO March 10 that the demonstration was organized by himself, ISCI's Furat al-Shar'a, and Abd al-Aziz al-Hakeem's representative Abd al-Kareem al-Jaza'iri. Observers and media sources report that the protestors, predominantly male, represented the Basrah Islamic List (BIL) of the provincial council (ISCI/Badr, Sayyid al-Shuhada, Thar Allah, Shaheed al-Mihrab, Hizbollah Movement), but also included tribal leaders and even police officers.

¶4. (C/REL MCFI) Media reports on the number of participants vary from the hundreds to the thousands, but witnesses and police chief MG Jalil Khalaf Shuwayl told us there were between 600-800 individuals. Reporters also told us they were threatened by participating parties to report higher numbers in their press stories. Predictably, al-Rashid told us that BIL amassed up to 10,000 participants, including 700-800 women and 60 tribal sheikhs, though he failed to name a single tribe when asked.

#### PROTESTORS CRITICIZE THE ISF

¶5. (C/REL MCFI) Media reports widely claimed that the protestors called for the resignations of police chief Jalil and the Basrah Operations Commander, GEN Mohan Hafith Fahad al-Fariji. When asked if this were true, Rashid said that one or two protestors might have had posters to that effect, but it was not a demand of the organizers. Rashid, however, blamed Mohan and Jalil for some of Basrah's problems and claimed that security meetings with them only yield promises and little action.

¶6. (C/REL MCFI) Al-Rashid claimed that the demonstration was born out of frustration with the ISF for failing to enforce the law. Efforts to improve the ISF, especially in preparation of the British security turnover to the GOI in December, have largely failed, he said. As a result, murders, kidnappings, and other crimes have increased. He noted that in the past crimes were committed away from ISF locations, but now officers would not even react to crimes that occurred in plain view of them.

¶7. (C/REL MCFI) Rashid also gave us a written statement from the BIL parties, using the moniker "the al-Hakim Movement," which was read during the protest. The document states that despite the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Basrah today suffers from murders akin to the systematic killing practiced by the former Ba'ath party. The document expressed BIL's past optimism that the GOI would address these problems, as the authors "stood side-by-side with the ISF...but, nothing has been accomplished." It then blames the ISF with negligence in performing their duties and affirms the following:

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- condemns killings, kidnappings, robbery, smuggling, extortion, corruption and call for the punishment of criminals at all levels;
- holds the GOI, ISF, and provincial government responsible for failing to protect citizens and asks them to correct themselves;
- requests local citizens to notify the ISF of criminal activities to facilitate arrests;
- asks local political parties to redress security problems;
- and affirms their support to the ISF in implementing the rule of law.

The letter and a REO translation have been scanned and emailed to Embassy Baghdad political section.

#### JALIL RESPONDS

¶8. (C/REL MCFI) Afterwards, Jalil held his own press conference defending the rights of the demonstrators to express their opinion, recognizing that more needed to be done to enforce the law, but defending the recent performance of the police. He recounted recent ISF operations to increase the presence of officers on the streets, securing the release of ten individuals kidnapped over the preceding ten days, and the "arrest of 64 people accused of carrying out sabotage and terrorist operations throughout Basrah."

#### ISCI/BADR'S ULTERIOR MOTIVES

¶9. (C/REL MCFI) ISCI/Badr may have had ulterior motives for holding this demonstration. One possibility is that ISCI wants

to pressure the ISF into tackling Badr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) rivals. Several ISF officials and Governor Mohammed Musibh Wa'eli told us that recent Badr-JAM confrontations in Basrah have resulted in the deaths of around 30 Badr fighters. Additionally, COL Qasim Ubayid, a known ISCI member and police inspector from Nasiriyah, was shot March 3 in his vehicle along with four other occupants in downtown Basrah. According to Jalil, JAM was responsible.

¶10. (C/REL MCFI) ISCI may also be seeking to replace Mohan and Jalil with ISCI affiliates. Since arriving in Basrah, Mohan and Jalil have generally remained neutral. If anything, Mohan has earned ISCI's ire by cutting informal deals with JAM. Were ISCI to control the ISF, it could better protect itself. Governor Wa'eli opined to the REO on March 10 that the protest was a message to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to remove Mohan and Jalil because both are outspoken critics of Iranian interference in Basrah. Furthermore, controlling these ISF positions would help ISCI possibly fix the outcome of upcoming elections and regain control of Basrah from the Fadhila party. (Note: Al-Rashid was the former governor and remains Wa'eli's arch-political rival. End Note.) The protest also helps ISCI portray itself as the party of law and order - a chief concern for Basrawis - for upcoming elections.

#### HIZBOLLAH MOVEMENT GETS IN THE ACT

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¶11. (C/REL MCFI) On March 13, a few hundred members of the Hizbollah Movement also demonstrated before the governorate building. The purpose of the demonstration was to show support for the ISF and seek inclusion of Hizbollah militants into the ISF. Hizbollah leader Abd al-Rahman Sabri told Radio Sawa that an unidentified advisor in the Prime Minister's Office only approved the integration of 250 out of 3,000 members into Basrah's ISF. Sabri demanded the integration of all 3,000 claiming they had no ties to Lebanese Hizbollah or "external relations." (Comment: By external relations, he likely meant Iran. End comment.)

#### COMMENT

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¶12. (C/REL MCFI) Despite the political motives behind the ISCI-led demonstration, the event highlights the widespread perception among Basrawis that the security situation has failed to improve and in the view of some, continued to worsen. We anticipate further protests from these and other parties as they compete to win over voters in the run-up to elections scheduled for October 1.

HHOWARD